

Concordia Journal

Volume 39 | Number 4

Article 12

2013

Advent 4 • Isaiah 7:10–17 • December 22, 2013

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Recommended Citation

Becker, Wally (2013) "Advent 4 • Isaiah 7:10–17 • December 22, 2013," *Concordia Journal*: Vol. 39: No. 4, Article 12.

Available at: <http://scholar.csl.edu/cj/vol39/iss4/12>

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“Behold the virgin is about to become pregnant and bear a son, and you will call his name Immanuel” (Is 7:14).

Unfortunately, the commentary for this part of Isaiah, written by Dr. Andrew Bartelt, that will be part of the CPH Commentary Series, has not yet been published. It should be available in three years, the next time this lesson is used. Dr. Bartelt says, “The key exegetical theme is that the presence of God is both judgment and salvation, but his promises to the house and lineage of David—botched up by his people in every generation—are both present and future and full-filled in the Christ, David’s Son and David’s Lord.”

Dr. Jeffrey Gibbs, in his commentary on Matthew 1:1–11:1, deals with Isaiah 7:14 in its Old Testament context as well as the context of Matthew 1:21–23.¹

People today think a lot like Ahaz, “I have already made up my mind, don’t confuse me with the facts.” Consider Ahaz, King of Judah, afraid that the kings of Israel and Syria will unite and bring destruction on his kingdom. Isaiah comes to Ahaz with encouraging news from God. “It will not happen. They will not stand. Ask for a sign to know that God is with you to deliver you.” Instead of trusting in God for help and deliverance, Ahaz has already determined to seek help in an alliance with Assyria to the north. So instead of choosing a sign, since he was not trusting in God for help anyway, he piously states that he will not test the Lord. Does he not realize that God can see into his heart? So God gives his own sign: Immanuel.

People are blinded by a world view that is contrary to the scriptural view. They want to explain the existence of the world without giving credit to the Creator God who made it. They look for assistance and support from everyone and everything, other than their loving Father who provides for all their needs. They look for salvation in manmade religions or the things they have done instead of from the gracious Lord who already provided for eternity in Christ. They have already made up their minds and it will be difficult for even the truth to convince them otherwise.

What about us? We also find ourselves trusting in our own strength or the strength of our own alliances rather than trusting in the Lord. We make our plans as though we had control of the future, sometimes without even praying and consulting God for direction and guidance. We trust our income, bank accounts, retirement funds, the government, to provide for all our needs, and we panic when these things fail us. We trust our military strength and power of might to secure our own peace and the peace of our allies, but realize that there is so much war and violence, not just in other parts of our world, but right here in our own neighborhoods.

God promises to be with us, and gives us the sign of Immanuel. A virgin does become pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit, and the child born is truly God and truly man. She calls him Jesus because he will save his people from their sins, but he is truly Immanuel, God with us. All this has happened for us, but have we already made up our minds and don’t want to change them? Don’t confuse me with the facts. How teachable are we? How open are we to letting God and his word shape our lives and guide our decisions?

The sign of God's Immanuel comes as both law and gospel. God is indeed with us through the virgin birth—the incarnation of Jesus. The word became flesh and dwelt among us. He continues to be God with us as he comes into our lives through his Word and Spirit.

The sign of Immanuel is a call to repentance for all who trust in their own strength, their own way, their own works, their own world view; for, apart from Jesus, God with us, there is no other way, no other rock, no other salvation.

The sign of Immanuel is a call to repentance for us, who want to trust in Jesus and follow as his disciples. It is a reminder that we need to take inventory of our own alliances and friendships—where we place our hope and trust—and bring those back to Christ alone.

The sign of Immanuel is a sign of hope and promise, of grace and mercy, for Jesus has come to be with us, with forgiveness, life, and salvation. He is with us in the good times and the bad, but we really need to know that he is with us in the bad times. He is with us when everyone and everything is against us. He is with us when the bottom falls out and we are falling into despair or brokenness. He is with us through the tragedies of life, and through the valley of the shadow of death. He will take us through death to share the glory of heaven with him. Trusting in him and his promises we are truly secure in this life and in the life to come.

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Endnote

<http://scholarics.ledu/cj/vol39/iss4/12>
Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 109–114.